



Are We Paying Attention to the **RIGHT CONVERSATION?**

Conversation, beyond a doubt, is the marketing buzzword of the last couple of years. Listen to the conversation. Be part of the conversation. Make sure your brand isn't left out of the conversation.

Patients on Facebook. Caregivers on YouTube. Healthcare practitioners on Sermo. Pharma on Pinterest. Everyone posting, commenting, sharing, and taking part in the conversation about diseases, brands, and companies.

But are we focused on the most critical conversation of all?

Obviously it's important that we, as marketers, pay attention to what people are saying about our brands. With social media exploding, more people are saying more things in more places than ever before. We do have to be there.

But there's another conversation that we really never get to hear, one that's probably more important than any other. It's the discussion that happens in the practitioner's office between the patient and his or her physician. It may be a diagnosis being delivered, a treatment being discussed, or an opinion being questioned. And while we'll never hear what's actually being discussed during those office visits, we do need to pay attention to the fact that this is the time and the place where your brand is prescribed, or not.

But physicians and patients have always had conversations, you may be thinking. Why pay special attention now, you may ask. The reason is simple: the conversation isn't the same one that was happening just a few years ago.

Control of the Discussion Has Shifted

Just a few short years ago, physicians basically wrote orders and patients followed them.

The man or woman in the white coat was revered and not to be questioned. And, quite frankly, they were probably the only source of trustworthy information about a disease or condition, at least in the patient's eyes.

Today, it's different. First of all, the tidal wave of baby boomers is crashing into prescribers' offices with the same attitude they've had their entire lives. They're active, involved, demanding, and questioning. Add to that the fact that the Internet offers unlimited access to health information (both good and bad), and you've got a new kind of patient walking into the doctor's office. They come in with their own opinions, they don't trust all

they're told, and they want to be in control of their health. Physicians, more time pressed than ever, are left to figure out how to make their patients trust their counsel.

Help Prescribers Talk with Their Patients

This new dynamic presents a very real opportunity for pharma brands, if brand managers and their agencies are willing to think differently. Up until now brand managers have focused the majority of their attention on two conversations — the one between the rep and the prescriber, and more recently the one between the brand and the patient, using a mix of DTP and DTC channels to reach patients directly.

But what if we focused more attention on that conversation that's going on at the moment of truth — the moment that the prescriber tells the patient what's wrong and prescribes a treatment to fix it? What if pharma brands, in service to prescribers, helped to facilitate that conversation?

It's not that hard, but it does require added investment in a few key areas and a rethinking of a sales rep's role. Let's put aside the "3 key

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Contributed by



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messages and you're done" strategy. The truth is that prescribers can find a brand's clinical data in an instant, so simply reinforcing a brand's clinical story isn't really enough anymore. Put the rep in the position to help physicians not only understand a brand's story, but understand how a physician can use that brand to practice better medicine.

Provide programs that support the physician, their NPs and PAs with the tools and resources needed to better and more efficiently communicate with more demanding patients. Arm the prescribers with answers to their patients' questions. Help them filter the good, the bad, and the inaccurate information they and their patients find online. Help them see the best place your brand fits into disease treatment. Give them ways to support patient adherence to their treatment plan. And most important, help them rebuild the trust that's so important to a physician-patient relationship.

Technology will continue to make more conversations possible in more places with more people. Let's just make sure we're not forgetting one of the most important ones of all. **PV**

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